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**The Iowa Blind History Archive  
History of Blindness in Iowa - Oral History Project  
Interview with [Name]  
Conducted by [Name]  
[Date]  
Transcribed by [Name]**

**NOTE: Any text included in brackets [ ] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.**

**Helen Smith  
Meredith Ferguson  
Boone, Iowa  
5-3-11**

**Meredith Ferguson: This is Meredith Ferguson and I'm interviewing Helen Smith. The date is May 3, 2011 and the interview is taking place at Helen's apartment here in Boone, Iowa.**

**Helen Smith: In the court yard of the OAS Home. Do you want that bit of?**

**Ferguson: Oh sure, yes.**

**Smith: Okay at the Court Yard at the OAS Home.**

**Ferguson: Okay, thank you. And, it's a little after 1 pm. And before we begin, Helen, could you give me your full name?**

**Smith: Helen Virginia Smith**

**Ferguson: Okay.**

**Smith: Or do you want the maiden name as well?**

**Ferguson: Sure if you want to.**

**Smith: Helen Virginia Jenkins Smith.**

**Ferguson: Okay, and your age?**

**Smith: 96.**

**Ferguson: 96 okay.**

**Smith: 97 in August; closer to 97.**

**Ferguson: That you are.**

**Smith: That's right.**

**Ferguson: The purpose of this interview is that it's going to become part of the Iowa Department for the Blind's History of Blindness in Iowa, Oral History Project. Helen, do I have your consent to record this interview?**

**Smith: Yes.**

**Ferguson: Okay. To start off, you told me that you have Macular Degeneration.**

**Smith: Yes.**

**Ferguson: Could you tell me round about when that started and how it's progressed?**

**Smith: Yes. 30 years ago, probably, I was aware that I that my vision wasn't too accurate. And, say ten years ago I quit driving, eleven years ago. And, at the time that I was diagnosed with Macular Degeneration I had four sisters, three of them were also diagnosed with Macular Degeneration. And of them, I was the youngest, but mine developed more than any of the rest. My one older sister was four years older before she died, which was in her 80s. She was using a magnifying glass. But, the other two, one of them that died at a hundred and one, just in 2011; it never did develop any further. And, then the other sister died in her 80s, and it had never really developed, but I thought that was interesting apparently the genes it was strong in the genes.**

**Ferguson: And, you sound like you have a long lived family.**

**Smith: We do have. A hundred and one is a good many years, yes.**

**Ferguson: Yes. Okay, could you tell me where you were born and raised?**

**Smith: Yes. I was born in Louisa County on a farm near Columbus Junction, Iowa. And, I grew up on the farm and after then, when I was married two years after, I was out of high school, we were farmers for, oh probably seven, eight years. And, then we went into...You don't' need to know all of this, particularly, do you?**

**Ferguson: Oh sure, yeah. Anything you'd like to share.**

**Smith: We moved; we went 50-50 with a nephew on the farm and we moved to Ogden, Iowa where we had a Ford agency for 20 years. And, at that time the vision...That would have been in '52. And, I was going to say I hardly think that I had any indication that I was, had any loss of vision at that time.**

**Ferguson: Okay.**

**Smith: And, I didn't work outside of the home. I kept the books, secretary for the Ford agency. But, other than that...Well, I will go back further.**

**I had a close friend that was Post Master. And, not having worked out in, out of the home before, I thought it would be kind of a challenge to see whether...So, I took the test and did work in the post office for ten years all together. First, it was just the little town of Ogden, and**

there I had no vision problem. I never had, very little lens correction from the very beginning, but at that time I did get a trifocal simply because of the work in the post office. There were the three different levels that I was...But, and then I went from there to the Sectional Center in Des Moines for four years simply because there was no...In Ogden, it was a small town and there wasn't enough business to...We'd go down to separate mail probably for a couple of hours and that would be it. So, I transferred and worked at the Sectional Center for...And, at that time there was still no indication of any vision loss.

**Ferguson:** So, you really didn't' have any indication until you said 30 years ago. So you were in your 60s?

**Smith:** I would say about that, 60s, 70, 80.

**Ferguson:** Okay. And it just kind of just slowly deteriorated?

**Smith:** Right off, I cannot remember when I first had an indication that I wasn't seeing as accurately. I'm guessing at 30 years; I don't know.

**Ferguson:** Oh sure, yeah.

**Smith:** I don't know whether it was that long ago. I do know that I quit driving eleven, twelve years ago. And, at that time the vision wasn't really all that bad, but I was aware that I did have a certain amount of loss. And, I thought, living in a small town, oh five o'clock in the evening, or dusk, that some youngster on a bicycle would be...And, I ought not to take a chance. So, I was never told I couldn't drive.

**Ferguson: Okay, yeah you just made that decision on your own.**

**Smith: I made that decision primarily because of that responsibility, yeah.**

**Ferguson: Okay, could you tell me a little bit about where you went to school? You said you just went to high school?**

**Smith: Yes, this was back in Louisa County. There was Columbus Junction, which is south of Iowa City between Washington, Muscatine, Iowa, was the general location. And, I never went to a great, I mean a country school. There was a little town of Cotter; I imagine about a hundred and fifty people, but it was a thriving little town. And they built; it was a consolidated school, a new two-story brick building. We thought it was great at the time. Our class was the first one that started in the first grade, no kindergarten at that time, and went through the twelve years. And, after twelve years of high school I had a year at what, at that time, was State Teachers of Cedar Falls; it's UNI now. And I must say, at that time, two years of college you could teach. And, I really didn't have any real drive for teaching or any particular thing, but I had that year. And, my husband and I had dated over the years, and we got back together again. So, I didn't go back for the second year, the biggest mistake of my life. We could have waited a year.**

**Ferguson: What year was that? Do you remember?**

**Smith: Yes I graduated from high school in '32. Yes, and we were married in '34. It's a long time ago isn't it?**

**Ferguson: Yeah.**

**Smith: Yes, it really is.**

**Ferguson: Does it seem that long ago?**

**Smith: It never did. I've been blessed with good health, and I've enjoyed music and art. Later, after working in the Sectional Center in Des Moines, I had always...These were down in the grades. We had a teacher that had us do charcoal drawing, and apparently I showed a little bit of talent. I always said after I quit working I would see if I could, which I did. I went into oil painting.**

**Ferguson: Oh wow!**

**Smith: And, we had brush and palate club here in Boone and Ames. But then the vision, and this I was going to say, how many years it's been that I had to quit painting because I couldn't see the color and just didn't, wasn't able to, just simply couldn't' go ahead and do it anymore.**

**Ferguson: Kind of going down my list of questions, could you tell me a bit, did you have any children?**

**Smith: Had three children, two daughters still living. Our son passed away ten years ago with cancer, esophageal cancer.**

**Ferguson:** Okay, I'm going to get a little bit into more of the years with your Macular Degeneration, I guess. Did you...what kind of interaction have you had with the Department? Just the library, or have you been involved with the Independent Living Program at all, or?

**Smith:** Nothing but the library, primarily; only the library.

**Ferguson:** So, that's just mainly the library is your experience with the Department?

**Smith:** Yes.

**Ferguson:** I guess, because I was just going to ask if you had learned any skills over the years; how you cope, living on your own since you can't see very well. So, how you function on a daily basis?

**Smith:** Well, I will say that I had been so much aware of how much the sense of touch, that we just automatically, we do without even knowing it. And, when I would find that I couldn't see I would just, I can't think, the feeling of say, a pair of earrings for instance. I couldn't really tell it, but I knew the feel of it; and just things...

**Ferguson:** Memory of your touch is how you...

**Smith:** Yeah, the sense of touch has played a big...I find I'm depending on that an awfully lot more.

**Ferguson:** Have you found it frustrating, kind of?



**Smith:** Very; very frustrating as it was, because I've always been active, sports and all. And yes, and terribly frustrating in that painting that I had to give...That was really hard to do, because I thoroughly enjoyed doing that. And, I have also, this is developed. I mean I'm aware of it now, and in these years of my life how much the loss of vision...and I do have hearing aids which I've had for two years now, but how much that affects your personality, how you react to people. I go down, say to the dining room here in the last six months. I don't recognize who's sitting where and you are inclined to, rather than embarrassing yourself doing some, you know, some embarrassing sort of thing, you more or less live a life of your own more or less.

**Ferguson:** You just kind of sit back and observe? Is that kind of more quiet?

**Smith:** You do. And its...my personality has never...I've been a part of activities, I mean, just of environment. And, that is the hardest thing to realize that, how to cope with this. In fact, I will...this has been, oh, probably twelve or thirteen years ago, I was in the living room standing I know. And, I don't know what I was wanting to do, but I was frustrated. I couldn't do it and I said, "God, show me the way to cope with this blindness!" And, I had a sense of presence, is the only way I can say that, but it was such...it's something that was so very real. I can't see that it's been any particular thing that's happened that has told me that my...that that cry for help it really was hardly a prayer; it just came out, because as I was standing there I can still feel it. I was saying, "Well, one way or another I will cope with it."

**Ferguson: Well, there you go! Yeah, must have been a good moment.**

**15:00**

**Smith: It was! If I ever doubted prayer... And, I'm not a radical religious person; I've grown up in the church. If I ever doubted prayer or the presence of God it was certainly not then!**

**Ferguson: Did you feel a nice boost of confidence, or did you notice a...?**

**Smith: You know, it was...I still, I can feel what...I was standing there; I just had, just a moment of a presence. That's the only way I can explain it; that there was a presence there. And, where I'd been frustrated, I stood there and I thought well one way or another.**

**Ferguson: You'll accomplish it; you'll find a way. And, have you noticed a difference since then that you?**

**Smith: Not really. There have been times as I look back, I think, how I've responded or comments I have made that made me aware that this wasn't me talking, you know. It was subconscious, that yes.**

**Ferguson: I guess, I asked kind of more about that, since we're really interested in how; on attitudes of blindness and how people responded, and how they've coped. How they've, the skills that they've learned to, kind of move on. We're really interested in hearing individual stories, just**

**because it speaks a lot about the individual themselves, and then it tells us a little bit more about kinds of variety of what people have done over the years.**

**Smith: And, the possibilities of being able to cope.**

**Ferguson: Yes. I mean, becoming blind isn't the end all that it's...You can find a way.**

**Smith: That's true.**

**Ferguson: Yeah.**

**Smith: And, I'm finding the difference. There are three of us here in the Masonic Eastern Star Home; that one of them here is very much one hundred percent blind, but she is battling it emotionally. It's really a struggle for her, is the only way I can say it. She's really struggling. And, mine has come. I'm not...they have told me...I have gone to the Wolf Iowa City. I haven't gone outside of Iowa for checking this blindness, but they have said, "You'll never go completely blind." And so, I guess I am thinking, well, you know, I'm still able to go into a building, into a room and see the pieces of furniture and people. But, you look at people and you're in the habit of looking at them, you know, as you carry on a conversation. But, you miss a lot by not getting that expression with talking with people. You have to rely pretty much on what they say and their attitude, I guess you would say, because you don't get facial expressions. You don't get a response that way. And, we do say a lot through facial expression.**

**Ferguson: Oh yeah.**

**Smith: Yes that, I would say that is a real, makes a real difference; not being able to communicate with people the way you normally had.**

**Ferguson: But, you seem like it's still frustrating. But, you've moved past it a little bit? Have you found a way to?**

**Smith: It's just well, say...and I've never been a down person, but when it seems like, you know, there's not much need to make much effort to do anything because you can't see to do it; you just are, are not able to. And, I think, well, come on now. There are other people that are coping with far, you know, greater. And, know just to appreciate the blessings that we do experience.**

**Ferguson: Okay, so I guess I want to hear or talk a little bit about your involvement with the library? Are you involved in the book club or a book discussion?**

**Smith: I'm involved with the book, library in the book club; not a club, actually, but I'm never without books. And, I will say there has...I don't think, almost without exception, I've ever called down and asked for a book, but what they had it. And I do, but there is a group that we have. There's about seven or eight of us every six weeks we have a book, and then we critique the book. Other than that its...when my daughters were here, here maybe last year we did...I said I would like to go to the building on fifth Street, I think it is, down in Des Moines fourth or fifth. So we did. We went down. And, I had two grand-daughters in their 40s, and we**

**all just thoroughly enjoyed it. And, I just was amazed at the...I couldn't see detail, but I could see the volume of books or tapes that they would have, yes. And, I've had nothing but courtesy and assistance in any way they could suggest a book. Or I'll call down and want a biography or something, or a historic novel. And, I just got through finishing reading, it was China, anyway. It was a couple that back in '94--in 1994--that had written this book, "China Lives," I think. They were trying to display the soul of China from way back, and what had developed up to the 1990s. They were Pulitzer Prize winners. She was an American born Chinese. He was American. They lived five years in China. They were journalists, both of them. And, I just finished that book, and now I'm reading a biography of Katherine Grimm.**

**Ferguson: Okay nice. So, certainly sounds like you stay busy. You keep yourself occupied.**

**Smith: Very. In fact, I think sometimes I get so absorbed in a book. Now the, "China Lives," I think was one that you, that I, really had to listen to. And, I didn't just sit there and listen, but I've had many times I hated to go down to eat, you know, because it was just too good to leave. (Laughter) And, I even tell myself, you know, you're spending too much time just here listening to books. You need to get out, you know. I do find that, that's; I do need to make myself do that.**

**Ferguson: And, I noticed that you have the cassette player, and also the digital player right?**

**Smith: Yes.**

**Ferguson: Can you tell me, have you liked the change in technology? It's something, like, technology's just changing it seems. And so, I'm just curious about your thoughts on it, if you like it?**

**Smith: Yeah, well yes really, but well an awfully lot. In fact, a lot of the tapes a time or two, I'll put it that way; that I called. And this was, "The Age of Jackson. " This was within about the last month that, for whatever reason, I wanted to listen to that. They said they didn't have it. And, I called down later and well just about a week ago, in regard to the China, and I mentioned, "The Age of Jackson," well they have it on tape, but not on the digital. So, the lady I was talking, I think, there's Sue, and I forget the other one's name.**

**Ferguson: Rachael?**

**Smith: Yes. And, one of the girls is blind when we were down there.**

**Ferguson: Uh-huh.**

**Smith: Now, who is she?**

**Ferguson: That is Susie, or Susan. I don't know how she introduces herself on the phone.**

**Smith: Susie.**

**Ferguson: Susie is blind, yes.**

**Smith: Okay, so we saw Susie. And she has this dog, I think, didn't she?**

**Ferguson: Yes, I've seen her dog.**

**Smith: That was in a visit to the building. We were down here just about last year.**

**Ferguson: Susie's really nice. They both do a really great job. So, do you use any other, I guess, technology or devices throughout the day, other than your book players; like any magnifiers?**

**Smith: I've had all kinds of magnifiers, and I still use this little one. But, I also have a reader that I had for years; that I just hesitate to get up and go in and read. I have several sheets in there now that I can't see. And, the vision is getting down enough that this one isn't, well, you can see about one or two letters at a time.**

**Ferguson: Can you explain what the reader is, just for...because the people that are going to be listening to the interviews really are the general public, and so not all of them know what, when you call it a reader, they don't know what it is.**

**Smith: Well, it's a screen...there's a plate, where you put your sheet of paper on a plate, and it comes up on a screen. And, you can adjust it for dark and lightness and larger or smaller.**

**Ferguson: And you really liked it?**

**Smith: I don't use it as much as I should, but it's there if I make the effort to. It's in the bedroom that you can see. I guess, and the time may come that this...because I got the strongest magnifying glass when we were visiting the library last year. I got the strongest one they had, which is even a little smaller glass than the most magnification. The thicker the glass, I think, is that...**

**Ferguson: Okay, yeah I think you're right; yes.**

**Smith: So, I've gone to the smallest single, and so I'll go to the reader. There is a term for that, rather than call it a reader, but that's the only thing, the only name that I...And, I've had that for oh, a number of years, but I just don't use it to the degree simply because I'm comfortable where I'm sitting. And, I don't go in to the bedroom where I have to keep it, yeah.**

**Ferguson: Was that the first one that you got?**

**Smith: That's the only one I've had, yes. They have one here in the library, I think. Well, they have several of them in different libraries on different floors that you can go, yeah.**

**Ferguson: Are there any other activities that you do, that you get involved around here?**

**Smith: Not a great deal and it's...I moved. I left my home in Ogden and came over to the duplexes of the Masonic**



**Eastern Star complex. And, three years ago is when I moved over to the apartment here in the main building in the court yard. And, it took me about nine months to adjust, but it was my idea. I just was particularly comfortable over...I had everything I wanted, I'll say, over in my little duplex; and coming here. So, I think primarily, is I get settled with a book or something and I don't leave it. I'm too satisfied with just the reading that I get, I guess. So, I don't go down to play BINGO particularly, which is available quite often. And, if there are...I do try to get up for chapel. It's at 8 o'clock, and to be up and dressed and down there by 8 o'clock is early.**

**Ferguson: Yes.**

**Smith: And, I'm trying to think of other activities. Here in court yard we just have the two meals noon and evening meals. So, we get our own breakfast. And, I have found in later years you make friends, but they're...at least I haven't, and I blame myself more than anybody else. You don't make lasting friendships or more involved friendships, deeper friendships, as you get older. At least I'm finding that. And, I attribute it to my own...I'm relying on these books, and I'm so grateful that as much as I've listened; I think about seven hundred when we were down there. They have a record of seven hundred books. And, some of them they've sent I know that I didn't read. I didn't, but I have read an awfully lot. It's a wonderful service.**

**Ferguson: Well, I'm glad that you enjoy it, that you're...**

**30:00**

**Smith: I can't say...I can't imagine what life would be like here without being able to read those books. I really can't. Then I think it would be most frustrating.**

**Ferguson: It's a good escape. It's good to immerse yourself in a good story. At least, I find it so.**

**Smith: Well, it could be a story but, or you know, an article like biographies.**

**Ferguson: Do you listen to IRIS at all? Have you heard of...? It's a reading radio service.**

**Smith: I went so far, I think it was talking about the same thing, went so far. You have to get your own number don't you?**

**Ferguson: I think so. I think that's how it works.**

**Smith: And about, oh a year, maybe two years ago when it first came out or when I was aware of it, I got that and I never followed through with it. But, I think that is for newspapers, magazines and so forth is that right?**

**Ferguson: They do a large variety of things.**

**Smith: Almost anything you would want.**

**Ferguson: Yes. It was about a month or so ago, I think. They did a special little thing for a lady in Des Moines. She had old letters from her husband. Like she had over**

**hundreds of letters, I think it was. And, she got to the point where she couldn't read them anymore. And so, they had volunteers come in, and they read all the letters, and they taped them so she could listen to them.**

**Smith: Oh, that was neat!**

**Ferguson: Yeah, so it's just...They do a number of things.**

**Smith: And, there again I was the one that didn't follow through with it. I just haven't...being lazy, maybe, not making that effort. I'm just so content and satisfied with the library, I guess.**

**Ferguson: No, there's nothing wrong with that.**

**Smith: Well, it has been a life saver for me.**

**Ferguson: Well, good. Would you be willing to talk a little bit more about, I guess, your variety of careers? You said that for a while you did secretarial work for your business?**

**Smith: Yes.**

**Ferguson: But, you worked in the post office for a little bit?**

**Smith: For a comparatively short time. When I transferred to the Sectional Center in Des Moines, then it was...we were sorting second, as I remember second class mail. And, when I first went down...I went down with...I had worked long enough that I was at level 9, as far as your service is concerned. And, I know the friends in the post office. The**

friend was a post master in Ogden and she was a lady. And, she was concerned that I hadn't...but after I was down there for, oh, a few weeks, maybe months, one of the district men that came around to the different post offices, we were talking. And so, he said...I don't know whether they were any inspectors or not, but he said, "Well, we'll go to..." you know. So, I told him the reason I transferred was because I was down to, maybe, two hours a day working, you know. And so, I was immediately granted...I wasn't granted, but established that I had had that many years service; where otherwise I wasn't aware of it when I made the transfer.

**Ferguson:** And, did you do the second, the secondary center in Des Moines, was that after you did the secretarial work?

**Smith:** Yes. I started the secretarial doing...and there again, I at the time, I was playing Bridge. And, when we first came to Ogden I had played cards but never played Bridge before. And, if you didn't learn to play Bridge, drink coffee...you might just as well... (Laughter) So, I learned to play Bridge. And there was, I don't know how many I belonged to, three Bridge clubs at the same...So, I spent a lot of time playing Bridge. And, we were leaving up when I started working. I can't decide when it was that I...About twelve years ago when I came from Ogden, over to the duplex in Boone, I was still able to play. I was still playing Bridge. And, they had condensed it down to two clubs, I think. I was still playing, but also was playing with a foursome, which I thoroughly enjoyed. But, the vision got to the place...Even though I got the largest cards we could get through the blind. And, it got to the place where it was just...I just felt it wasn't fair to the others to, you know, slowed things down too much. But no,

**that was...I could sit and play Bridge all afternoon, no problem. But, that was something that, that and painting, driving a car, are some of the major things that giving up because of not being able to see. It really makes a big difference. It came at different stages of vision loss.**

**Ferguson: Were you still working when your vision started to deteriorate?**

**Smith: No, I don't think so. See, I don't think so. I was...And, like I say, when I was working I was on my own time. So, what the reason I brought up the Bridge clubs at all. I was on my own time, so I could keep up with my Bridge playing and still keep the books, you know. And see, '52 and it was '70, in the 70s, later 70s when I transferred to Des Moines. I'm really not sure what...I could sit down and figure out, but it was that I transferred to Des Moines for the last four years and worked in the Sectional Center. The reason I quit then...the vision was still okay, but I was going to have to learn...I was, yes, it was making a difference because they were what they called the ZM. They were type...nine out of a group of nine machi...They were like a typewriter and then you would feed a tray of mail through. And, you would key it accordingly to send it to the right Sectional Center wherever you wanted it to go. And, I was getting slow. I like to think it was my vision, maybe it was my reflexes; they weren't as fast as they...but then, so at that time I had worked ten years in the post office, from the very first that I started in Ogden, you know, working at the small office. I would have needed to have learned a city scheme or something, which I, for whatever reason, decided...I took my employment. I didn't have to have it. We**

**didn't depend on it. So, it was something I could take it or leave it. So, then is when...it was at that time in my life that I started painting.**

**Ferguson: Do you want to tell me a little bit about that?**

**Smith: Only that I got my paints and canvas, and I say canvas, because a lot of the time it was just if, you know, its canvas board; it's not stretched canvas. It did go, the more I got into it, came with the brush and palate club In Boone, I got to the place where I did stretch canvas; learned how to stretch canvas and do a more professional job, you might say, of painting. No, I would say then. And, at that time my husband passed away in '86, so I can't...I was painting at that time, yes and before then. I'm sure I'm trying to connect different periods of, and how, the vision affected my lifestyle, you might say, and what I could and couldn't do.**

**Sewing, that was another thing. There were two things I said I never wanted...I never see the day that...I always loved to sew; made my own clothes. I preferred that than to buy them, really, because then I knew that no one was going to have anything just like it because I...**

**Ferguson: Yeah.**

**Smith: Yes, sewing and painting were two things that, when I had to give up, that I really...it wasn't work. Sewing wasn't work; it was a challenge, and the satisfaction of...at that time. There was a time there were a lot of fabric shops. You could go pick a fabric and then take a pattern and put the two together and come up with something, like I say,**

**that you knew that you weren't going to meet on the street anywhere.**

**Ferguson: So, when you talk about sewing, just sewing your own clothes or did you?**

**Smith: I really preferred to make them myself for that reason, yes. No I did sewing, oh, ever since I can remember. My mother sewed a lot and I...So, I've sewed ever since I can remember, really.**

**Ferguson: Did you sew other things?**

**Smith: I never quilted. Oh, yes I did a lot of what we called hand work embroidery, crewel and that sort of, yes. I did a lot of that. And my two daughters both...and the oldest daughter has a...she hasn't in the last years, but she became accomplished in sewing. My youngest one, it was slow enough for her that she didn't really get into it. My mother, I think, sewed; she could have been professional. She was very, very, she was good. And, my older sister had Home Economics at Iowa State; graduated four years. And, she did a lot of sewing. I grew up in a family that my parents, my father particularly, built all of us, you know, could have training over high school if we...**

**So, my oldest sister graduated from Iowa State. And, the next sister was nurse's training and she progressed to the place where she was supervising of nurses down at Iowa, yes. And, my next sister was one that started into nurse's training and married before she finished her three years; I think it was at that time. My next sister was in business school and she finished and was...She didn't work**

outside of the home all that much, but she was trained to do it. And, then I came along, and like I said, I had the one year at Iowa State, or at state teachers or UNI, and got married the second; didn't go back for my second year. I wasn't particularly...I can remember sitting with my father after high school graduation just deciding, well, where, you know, where I should go. And, at that age I didn't know...I really done anything particularly that I thought I'd want...some people were convinced that they knew, you know, when you graduate, that that's what they wanted to do. My sister that went into nursing was one. She knew that's what she wanted to do, and I didn't. So, Dad...I remember my dad said...Well in 1932, he thought, maybe, the teaching field might be the less crowded, would be the way to go. So, that was where I went into, but I will say I thoroughly enjoyed that year at Iowa State teachers. I was gifted with talent. I had a good voice, so I sang in the chorus. And I sang in the church, I mean, the collegiate choir. And I played a violin, and I took my violin with me, so I was playing in the symphony. And I joined a sorority. And at that time, they weren't even national sororities. But, I really enjoyed that first year of school, but I will say I didn't...and athletics.

45:00

**Smith:** In the Phys. Ed. I learned to play tennis, which I never played before, and we learned to play tennis. My sorority sister and I, we won the intramural games of tennis. So, like I said, I was always active, physically active, and reasonably, not gifted particularly, but it was easy for me. And it was fun, and the same way with music. And so, that was...I look back on it a year. It wasn't scholastically what



**it should have been, but it certainly was otherwise. It was great.**

**Ferguson: Did you keep the music up later on after school?**

**Smith: Well see, not...no. I can't think of any group, any like singing; any group that I sang with. Always church choirs, but, you know, that was because they needed all those that would sing, you know, that would take part in it, so I did; and as far as using my violin after that...I...not really. There just wasn't, as I know, an opportunity or at least I didn't play with any orchestra anywhere.**

**Ferguson: Going back to your family a little bit you said is it four sisters?**

**Smith: Yes.**

**Ferguson: And, they all suffer from Macular Degeneration, too?**

**Smith: All but one.**

**Ferguson: All but one?**

**Smith: All but one. And two of those never really, well, we were in...they were in their 70's when they were diagnosed. And, three of them, they were diagnosed within the same year. It was strange they were all diagnosed, but they were, I was going to say, up in years. I'm not sure whether they would be in their...whether it was their 70, yes, probably their 70's.**

**Ferguson: Are they older than you?**

**Smith: Yes. I grew up in a family...I had two younger brothers. We had a wonderful childhood, but we were all real close in age. We grew up as friends.**

**Ferguson: Okay, well that's nice.**

**Smith: It was nice. I can appreciate what great parents I had now. My mother had a delightful sense of humor. She moved from living in the small town of Columbus Junction, but moved out to a farm where we had no, at that time, there was no electricity. There was no running water, and she raised... But, she had a delightful sense of humor. And, as I got older we were...The afternoons would be spent sewing, and the evenings I can still see Mother and Dad, one on either side of the table in the evening, reading. Dad was in...he was very active in community; on the church board, on the, well, he was a representative for two terms I think it was. And Mother, she gave up her social life. I always say now that she gave up her social life, which she did drop it, to raising her family. We enjoyed...I look back on afternoons of sewing not as work, but just as fun things we were doing. They were interesting.**

**Ferguson: Nice; a good way of spending time with the family instead of working.**

**Smith: At that time, yes. There wasn't the activities. As we grew up, there wasn't the activities on the farm outside, well, really socially. It was through church activities. It**

would be church which we did from the time I remember how old I was, I don't know, but there would be, you know, at that time we would have a pew that each family, more or less, had their own place that they sat. And, I can just see Mother and Dad and then seven little kids, you know. And, I don't know how old I was, but I...when we went home from church one day my father said that he thought I was old enough that I didn't need to sit counting the squares in the ceiling rather than...(Laughter) And I remember just had wonderful parents. And Dad...I can still see. He taught men's class from ever since I can remember.

**Ferguson:** So, later on when you and your sisters started having vision problems, did you all kind of...Did you turn to each other for help or did you talk about it?

**Smith:** We were all out of the home by then.

**Ferguson:** Okay.

**Smith:** Yeah, we were all married by then.

**Ferguson:** Did you talk about it at all?

**Smith:** Not particularly, no.

**Ferguson:** I was just curious, since you all seem to have this similar diagnosis, if you had talked about it or?

**Smith:** No, I really...I think we were raised to...I don't know whether I should elaborate on that; to accept and learn to cope, and do the most with what you were left to work with.

**No, we really didn't. We didn't bemoan the fact that we weren't able to do this or do that, you know, because we...No, there was none of that.**

**Ferguson: You just kind of, you just accepted it.**

**Smith: Well, it was the fact...It had become a fact of life for us, yes.**

**Ferguson: And so, you all just kind of moved on in your own.**

**Smith: Well, first of all, we were scattered. My oldest daughter, sister I mean, was in Chicago and my next was in Cheyenne, Wyoming, and then my other two sisters were in Iowa. So, we were back and forth as our family was growing up. And my two brothers, I don't know what happened to them; they both from Iowa State. They both had four years in Iowa State. But no, we didn't, as I look back I don't want you to think that we dwelt on the fact that our vision was...In fact, my mother was diagnosed and I didn't know that until years later in her 70's that she...her vision...and hers never got ter...she was able to read clear up until the time of her death. But she did have, was diagnosed with Macular Degeneration. It was started but it never progressed.**

**Ferguson: Okay.**

**Smith: Didn't have a terribly unusual exciting life, but a very pleasant one.**

**Ferguson: Oh, it sounds like you lived a really great life with your family and you're still living a great life now.**

**Smith: Yes. And, at this stage in my life I've come to appreciate my parents the attitude that they taught us, you know, not to feel sorry for ourselves if whatever happened to be, you know, that wasn't what we wanted.**

**Ferguson: Sure, yeah. Well, it sounds like you had a really good solid upbringing, I think, as my grandmother would call it.**

**Smith: We really did. I know when my parents celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary there was a comment, you know, how our family had grown up. And I thought, well, what's so unusual about, you know, we grew up. We...it wasn't all that much of a problem. We didn't think we were.**

**Ferguson: Sure.**

**Smith: Even as I look back and talk, as we...at this age. This one friend that, well, I say we're all friends here. I'll put it that way. I was sitting at the table today, that celebrated her 98<sup>th</sup> birthday Sunday, and she was very pleasant. But we're at the place where we have walkers, which we go down to this dining room in the court yard; there's only about 38 or 40 of us. It's a smaller group. Then there's the residential dining room that has far more, but...and until last November when I fell and broke a hip I used a walker, but not all that much until now. My balance is such that I don't go anywhere. I don't want to take another chance.**

**Ferguson: Sure, yeah that's a wise decision, it sounds like. Well, unless you can...If you think of anything else you'd like to share or talk about, I've run through my list of questions.**

**Smith: You have?**

**Ferguson: Yes, I have.**

**Smith: And, I can't think of any great event, that any far reaching, or something that affected my life particularly. I go back to that day when I was so frustrated, and that I did relate.**

**Ferguson: But, it sounds like since then you're still frustrated, maybe, every now and then but you've moved on. You've learned to...**

**Smith: Enough to realize that yes, you know, there's no way but down if you start thinking, you know, thinking frustrating and think of the negative "No."**

**Ferguson: Yeah, it's a good way to live.**

**Smith: It is. I just think there and there again, I think that was...I think of my mother. And, you know, there were just...she was one in a million, she really was; but she...I was going to say she didn't tolerate...she didn't self-sympathy, you know. Get with it, do something about it.**

**Ferguson: There you go. Well, okay. If there isn't anything else then I'll go ahead and shut this off.**

**Smith: All right.**

**56:08**

**(End of Recording)**

**Beverly Tietz**

**6-23-11**